

OBITUARIES

# Michael Gibson — orchestrated popular Broadway musicals

By Mary Rourke  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Michael Gibson, who orchestrated dozens of popular Broadway musicals, including "Grease" and "Kiss of the Spider Woman," died July 15 of lung cancer at the Compassionate Hospice at St. Clare's Hospital in Dover, N.J., his wife, Ellen, told the Los Angeles Times this week.

Born and raised in Wilmington, Del., Mr. Gibson graduated from Harvard University and the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he studied trombone. He began his career as a studio

musician in New York City, often working with James Brown, the "Godfather of Soul," but Mr. Gibson changed career directions in 1972. That year, he orchestrated his first Broadway musical, "Grease," and went on to orchestrate the movie soundtrack in 1978, which became a platinum album.

He was known for a big, jazzy musical sound with plenty of brass.

"Michael Gibson was one of the best orchestrators we had," said Stephen Oremus, who co-orchestrated "All Shook Up," a Broadway musical that opened in May, with Mr. Gibson.

"He had an incredible pop sensibility, and he was a great jazz musician and orchestrator," Oremus said. "He wrote great brass and woodwind charts."

For more than 20 years, Mr. Gibson collaborated with the Broadway musical team John Kander and Fred Ebb, whose credits include "Cabaret" (1966) and "Chicago" (1975).

Mr. Gibson orchestrated several revivals of "Cabaret." He also orchestrated original productions of "The Rink" (1984), "Steel Pier" (1997) and "Kiss of the Spider Woman" (1995) by Kander and Ebb.

"Michael was fantastic at writing beefy brass and percussion sounds," recalled orchestrator Larry Blank, a longtime friend, in a statement.

Mr. Gibson's skills brought him the admiration of a number of stage dancers, Blank said, among them Chita Rivera, who won a Tony for her role in "Kiss of the Spider Woman."

He orchestrated solo shows for a number of dancers and performers, including Ann Reinking and Liza Minnelli.

Mr. Gibson did some work in Hollywood. He was the musical arranger and conductor for "Roseland" (1977), a romance set in the New York City dance palace, and he orchestrated "Still of the Night" (1982), a mystery that starred Roy Scheider and Meryl Streep.

Mr. Gibson is survived by his wife and his son, Andrew.

## Chronicle news obituaries

The Chronicle welcomes timely news obituary information and photos from family, friends and funeral homes. These obituaries, which run free of charge, are written by our staff with information gathered from relatives and our own research. Because of space limitations, obituaries with the broadest community interest are most likely to be selected for publication.

### To contact obituary writers or for more information:

Phone: (415) 777-7420

Fax: (415) 536-4287

E-mail: [obits@sfchronicle.com](mailto:obits@sfchronicle.com).

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## BERKELEY

# Suspect withholds plea in arraignment

Friend of victim being held without bail in murder case

By Jim Herron Zamora  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A 20-year-old former classmate of Meleia Willis-Starbuck was arraigned Friday on a murder charge in connection with the Dartmouth student's shooting death last weekend.

Christopher Larry Wilson Jr., 20, of Berkeley did not enter a plea during a brief appearance in Alameda County Superior Court.

His attorney, Elizabeth Grossman, told Judge Winifred Smith that he would enter a plea Wednesday, when a bail hearing is also scheduled.

Wilson, who is being held without bail, will ask the judge to lower his bail to a "minimal amount," Grossman said. She said outside court she hoped that prosecutors would reduce the charges against him, adding he "was completely unaware that a shooting or anything like that was going to take place."

"He had no idea there was a gun in the car," Grossman said. "He had no idea a gun would be used. Mr. Wilson is totally devastated and completely devastated by her death. He is really focused on Meleia's family and their suffering. This is an absolutely senseless tragedy."

At Grossman's request, about 30 people — Wilson's friends, relatives and former teammates — stood to show the judge their support for the former Berkeley High School baseball star.



Christopher Wilson



Christopher Hollis

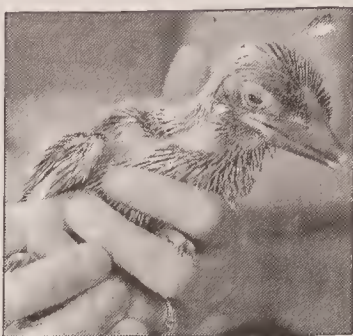
Prosecutors declined to discuss the decision to file a murder charge, and no documents were placed in the court file that detail his alleged role in the slaying.



LA FONZO RACHAL CARTER / The San Bernardino Sun

## Blaze in national forest

A California Highway Patrol officer watches a wildfire that burned through 30 acres of the San Bernardino National Forest on Friday. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage to homes, and the U.S. Forest Service is still investigating its cause.



PAUL CHINN / The Chronicle

This kookaburra chick hatched on July 5 and opened its eyes for the first time on Tuesday.

# Director of zoo hopeful about contract

► ZOO  
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Jan. 7. Wages have been frozen the past two years, but no-cost health insurance has been provided.

The union is seeking a retroactive bonus of \$200 per employee that would cover the first six months of this year, and 3 percent wage increases each year of a three-year contract. The zoo, however, is offering a 1 percent increase the first year, followed by 2 percent hikes each of the following two years.

Although the union has agreed to contribute to a health plan, the Zoological Society and its workers differ on what the payments should be, Lawson said.

The next step is seeking strike sanctions from Teamsters Joint Council 7, Lawson said. Then there would be another meeting with the membership — meaning nothing is imminent at this point.

"I can assure you that no matter what happens, the animals will be cared for," Mollinedo said. "And their cages will be kept clean."

As for who exactly might do that, Mollinedo said, "All the employees here would be taking on additional responsibilities."

If a strike did occur, it's not clear if the zoo would be closed to the public.

"I have not even given that any thought," Mollinedo said. "I'm optimistic."

Amiot said he expected Thursday's strike authorization vote to be much closer, but Mollinedo said he just wasn't sure how it would go.

"As far as I was concerned, it was a real crapshoot," he said.

He predicted that all contract differences could be resolved within 30 days.

"Our animal keepers are the highest paid in the nation," Mollinedo said. "Even more than the Bronx Zoo or the San Diego Zoo."

Michael McLaughlin, secretary-treasurer of Local 856, agreed.

"And we're proud of it," added McLaughlin, whose father organized at the zoo in the 1930s and battled a plan to charge for donkey rides.

In a good year, Amiot said, a keeper can make \$55,000, including overtime and holiday pay.

But he said he and his co-workers are aware that the new management team makes far more than its predecessors and that underlings see the gap as "inequitable."

"Our management employees are being paid what the market calls for," said Mollinedo, whose starting salary was \$200,000 when he was hired last year.

Amiot said many keepers are also upset about a recent change in their work schedules, from four 10-hour days a week to five eight-hour shifts.

In nonhuman matters, a kookaburra chick emerged from its egg on July 5 — the first successful hatching of such a bird at the zoo since 1999 — and opened its eyes on Tuesday.

The chick will be raised by its parents rather than being hand-reared, and will make its public debut when it comes out of its nest box in a few weeks.

In the wild, kookaburras are found in eastern Australia. Their loud, familiar call — koo-koo-koo-koo-koo-kaa-kaa-kaa — is often sung in chorus at dawn, midday and dusk.

And, at least on their home continent, they are known as "laughing jackasses."

E-mail Patricia Yollin at [pyollin@sfchronicle.com](mailto:pyollin@sfchronicle.com).

# Friends, family call for increasing gun control laws

► FUNERAL  
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phone during an argument with a group of young men. Hollis, who had previous run-ins with the law, also attended Berkeley High and graduated from Berkeley Alternative High School in 2001.

"They were her close friends, yet they made this horrible mistake," Berkeley High teacher Bill Pratt, who taught both Willis-Starbuck and Wilson, said after her service. "That's something I've seen students really wrestling with."

Friends and family wrestling with how to cope with the loss of Willis-Starbuck were urged at the memorial to follow her example and fight for social change, a value that was instilled by her activist parents at an early age.

Willis-Starbuck was a standout in Berkeley High's social justice program, fighting for the curriculum to include more African history and raising money so even needy students could participate in class trips to Cuba and Vietnam. After her family moved to Atlanta, she returned to her Berkeley hometown this summer to work with homeless women and children through a Dartmouth community service program.

Her cousin Chea Castro told mourners Willis-Starbuck would have admonished them: "Instead of wasting your energy on tears, why don't you get up, get out and do something about social injustice?"

"It is up to all of us to fulfill all her dreams and aspirations," said Castro, 35, who urged mourners to

## Community meeting

A community meeting on Meleia Willis-Starbuck's death is scheduled for Tuesday at 7 p.m. at St. John's Presbyterian Church, 2727 College Ave. A \$15,000 reward is being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Christopher Hollis. Anyone with information is asked to call Berkeley police at (510) 981-5741.

fight for more gun control.

Even Willis-Starbuck's 10-year-old brother, Zachary Starbuck, who called his big sister a superhero, told the crowd: "I think we should have a gun-free future."

While accomplished for her years, Willis-Starbuck had a typical teenage side, friends said. She loved clothes, shopping, having her nails done and spending time with friends.

She loved music and would have been thrilled, friends said, that one of her favorite performers, East Bay neo-soul singer Goapele, performed one of her favorite songs at the memorial.

Willis-Starbuck's close friends wore white, not black, and were joined by other mourners who tied purple ribbons around their wrists in honor of her favorite color and domestic violence victims, whom she championed. Some wore white T-shirts with a drawing of Willis-Starbuck on the front, her name



MICHAEL MACOR / The Chronicle

Dana Johnson (left) and Danielle Youngblood express sorrow at their friend's death.

and "R.I.P." on the back.

The service, which lasted more than two hours, was punctuated by sobs but also by laughter as friends recalled Willis-Starbuck's strong personality.

"You were my stubborn and free-spirited friend and sister," said Jonathan Lesane, one of the many Dartmouth students who attended. "Now, you're our stubborn and free-spirited guardian angel."

Friend Rafael Casal eulogized Willis-Starbuck in a poem he wrote, lauding her for "always having the courage to say something

bold," "giving hugs slightly longer than all the others," and "organizing kick ball games with the cliques that never were able to kick it together."

"A true hero makes you feel like you're the one who was heroic," he said.

Mercedes Ruiz-Hong said she never imagined losing her best friend, who just two weeks ago had thrown her a baby shower. Instead, she imagined Willis-Starbuck stroking her face during labor, teaching her daughter her first word — Meleia — and taking her for

her first manicure.

"It's amazing the way people were able to feed off the power, love, courage and strength you possessed, just by being in your presence," she said.

Willis-Starbuck's mother, Kimberly Willis-Starbuck, said she was taken with some of the words inscribed at the street-side memorial where her "baby girl" was killed.

"Rest in power, baby girl," she said.

E-mail Janine DeFao at [jdefao@sfchronicle.com](mailto:jdefao@sfchronicle.com).



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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# Lingering Japanese guilt for WWII sins

Editor — Regarding Charles Burrress' article, "Japan and the German sackcloth" (Insight section, July 17): One could conclude that Burrress is ignorant about what happened in China and the rest of East Asia during World War II, or is shockingly lacking in any sense of proportionality in moral judgment.

Japanese wartime atrocities included the most horrific, by now well-documented, Rape of Nanking (or "the forgotten holocaust" in the East). Even the Japanese high court admits to Japanese use of massive chemical warfare, the use of humans for biological experiments, dissecting of live humans and massive and organized forced sex labor (the infamous comfort women in Korea).

Recently there have been discoveries of toxic-gas plants, probably built by the Japanese in northern China. In terms of scale, the killing by the Japanese was massive and organized. The methods used were extremely brutal. Japanese wartime behavior created unstoppable resentment in all of East Asia, including not only China but Korea and the Philippines.

I am not an expert on the current China-Tibet conflict. But I do not see how one can compare that conflict with the record of the Japanese military in World War II. Not even the Dalai Lama has made such an accusation.

The question of whether the United States should apologize to Vietnam has nothing to do with what the Japanese government should do with respect to China, Korea and the Philippines.

The Great Cultural Revolution mentioned by Burrress was an internal affair of China, as the Civil War was an internal affair of the United States. Do not mix these up with other matters of war and peace.

I understand a rising China may cause anxiety among us, and a communist country should not elicit too much sympathy, either. But what is at issue here is a matter of humanity, not ideology or even nationality.

JENNY LAU  
Burlingame

Editor — Charles Burrress fails to

mention the fact that Japan was tried by the Allied forces in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, which ran from 1946 to 1948.

Millions of Japanese still feel that they were unjustly tried by a group of unqualified, subjective and racist legal "experts" in the name of justice.

For more than half a century, they have downplayed this resentment and showed remorse toward their true victims in China and Southeast Asia by giving them the biggest priorities for billions of dollars in governmental aid each year, since Japan was excused by the Allies' tribunal from paying reparations.

What is almost unknown outside Japan is that the Japanese universities have been very active in admitting students from China since the 1980s, and most are given a free ride and stipends during their stays in Japan to foster mutual understanding between the two countries. Japan has done more than enough.

KAZUHO BABA  
Anaheim

## Offer care where needed

Editor — Regarding the news article, "Laguna Honda rebuild revisited" (July 22): Let's talk facts. The city's promise to voters was to rebuild a health-care facility. The need for skilled-nursing units is not growing as the population increases. People are living longer and healthier and, increasingly, are able to age in place.

It does not take a magic wand to reallocate available funds to create more community living supports and serve more people who would otherwise be at Laguna Honda with the same dollars. What a statement to voters: "We will do more with the same dollars for the same people."

Also, let us not forget that the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed the civil right of people with disabilities to choose to live in the community rather than in an institution.

HERB LEVINE  
Executive director  
Independent Living Resource  
Center San Francisco



A SUSPICIOUS, UNIDENTIFIED PACKAGE HAS BEEN LEFT ON THE NATION'S DOORSTEP...

PAT OLIPHANT / Universal Press Syndicate

# Poor example in broken promises to teachers

Editor — In the article, "State must correct its record of breaking promises to teachers" (Open Forum, July 18), Claudia Haas of the San Francisco Unified School District described how she and other teachers felt "demoralized and angry" upon learning that the state pulled the plug on a promise of \$10,000 for teachers who earn certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

As a national board-certified teacher, she indicated that teachers saw the monetary incentive as an opportunity to develop as professionals and to supplement their incomes in order to afford to live in the cities where they work on teachers' salaries.

If our committed teachers are feeling demoralized and angry, we must ask the question: What effect does this have on the youth in our public schools? And what are we going to do about it.

Investing in teacher professional development that transforms and improves teaching and learning is investing in our young people and the future of our city and state.

For 26 years, the San Francisco Education Fund has been supporting innovative teachers with bold visions of what learning can be like for all their students, because we believe that high-quality innovative teaching leads directly to student success.

As Haas noted, all the research points in this direction. What can we do to set an example for our youth, who we expect to put their all into their education?

It's simple: We must follow through on the promises we make to their teachers. How can we demand accountability from our teachers and their students if we don't deliver it ourselves?

ROBIN MENCHER  
Program director  
S.F. Education Fund  
San Francisco

## A good old bridge deal

Editor — Reading of legislative and gubernatorial approval of legislation to generate money to complete reconstruction of the eastern portion of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, including another toll increase on the Bay Area's seven state-owned bridges, put me in mind of history — about the only subject I can comment on publicly as a retired judge who still sits by assignment. Your articles recognize that the new legislation requires Bay Area motorists to pay more than 80 percent of the cost of reconstructing this important part of the state highway system.

In 1998, as state Senate Transportation Committee chairman, I introduced and pursued successfully two measures that required area motorists to pay only one-third of the reconstruction cost. Southern, Central and Northern California legislators and then-Gov. Pete Wilson agreed that state gasoline taxes and other proceeds of post-Loma Prieta bonds should cover those costs, as would be the case with any other state highway.

Even Antonio Villaraigosa, then the Assembly speaker and now Los Angeles mayor, voted for such measures. Ah, those were the good old days.

QUENTIN L. KOPP  
Redwood City

## Flub on Prop. 77

Editor — It appears that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger really doesn't understand bureaucracy.

Up to the morning before Superior Court Judge Gail Ohanesian ruled Proposition 77, the redistricting initiative, off the state special-election ballot for November due to its supporters' presenting a different version to collect signatures from that presented to the state attorney general for preparation of an official title

## The weekly poll

Should the U.S. abandon the space-shuttle program?

No, this is a delay, not an abandonment  
44%

Yes, space exploration should be globalized  
12%

No, there are new worlds to conquer  
11%

Yes, unmanned flight is more cost effective  
33%

Total Votes: 409

NEXT WEEK'S TOPIC:

Should California's November special election be canceled?

Vote your choices at [sfgate.com/opinion](http://sfgate.com/opinion)  
This is not a scientific poll, but a tabulation of readers' responses

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901 Mission St.  
San Francisco, Calif. 94103  
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and summary, Schwarzenegger still insisted that the court fight was another effort to thwart his reform plan.

He never acknowledged that his own people erred over simple compliance. He could easily have gotten what he wanted.

SANDY JANE WONG  
Mountain View

# The Jefferson Award: Ruth Brinker, AIDS project founder



Each week, The Chronicle features a Bay Area resident who has won a Jefferson Award for making a difference in his or her community. The awards are administered by the American Institute for Public Service, a national foundation established in 1972 to honor community service. Bay Area residents profiled in The Chronicle will also be featured on CBS5-TV and KCBS-AM, which — along with The Chronicle — are Jefferson Award media partners.

By Suzanne Pullen  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

**Bay Area Jefferson Award winner:** Ruth Brinker, founder of San Francisco's Project Open Hand, the first meal-delivery service for people with AIDS.

**How she started:** Brinker was a retired grandmother in 1985, helping out at a meals-on-wheels program, when a friend died of AIDS. She soon realized that the ravages of the little-understood virus had weakened its victims so much that malnutrition was causing many to die before the illness did. "Most of them were gay men who had fled their families elsewhere," said Brinker. "They didn't have anyone to care for them." She called a social worker she knew and got the names of seven people she could help. With \$2,000 from the San Francisco Zen Center and the Golden Gate Business Association, she started Project Open Hand, making the first simple meals in her kitchen. "After the first delivery, I felt I should have asked for 20 names," she said. "They were so grateful."

Within a few months, Project Open Hand moved into San Francisco's Trinity Episcopal Church and volunteers began helping as word of the project spread. In 1987, with a \$125,000 donation from the Chevron Corporation, the nonprofit organization moved into a new kitchen and took over a food bank at 17th and Church streets. By 1988, Project Open Hand was serving 500 meals a day. The ground shook, literally, when it expanded meal service into Alameda County in 1989 — the day of the Loma Prieta earthquake. Two years later, Project Open Hand served its millionth meal.

**And now:** Project Open Hand provides meals, groceries and nutritional counseling for clients with HIV and AIDS, delivers meals to critically ill and home-bound clients under the age of 60, and provides lunches at 21 San Francisco sites for seniors. In 2004, its client list reached 30,000; more than 800 people are served by a second kitchen that opened in Oakland in 1996. Project Open Hand moved into its current facility on Polk Street in 1997. This year, the organization served its 9 millionth meal and distributed its

millionth grocery bag. Its 20th anniversary will be celebrated in October.

**Her inspiration:** "All those people inspired me to go on," said Brinker of the meal recipients. "They said what a contribution it was making to their lives. But it was really a benefit to me. It gave me a great deal of satisfaction to help in this way."

**Her vitals:** Brinker, 83, was born in South Dakota but spent many years in Chicago, where she attended the Chicago Art Institute. She moved to California in the mid 1950s and has two daughters, Sara and Lisa, who also live in San Francisco. Her daughter Lisa says that she once owned an antique store and wrote a column on pets for The Chronicle.

**Who has had the most impact:** Brinker said she will never forget one of her first meal recipients. She rang his doorbell, but got no answer. "He kept me waiting," said Brinker. "I thought he was home. I knew he couldn't leave the house, but he wasn't answering the door." She rang the bell several more times before she was buzzed in. When she climbed up

to his second floor apartment, she saw the door ajar. "He was on the floor. He had crawled to the buzzer, but didn't have the strength to get back to bed." A week of meals later, he was sitting in the sun on the steps outside, waiting for Brinker. "He said I saved his life," she said. "He told me how much the program meant."

**In her own words:** "My friends thought I was crazy at first, exposing myself to people with this illness. But I wasn't afraid. It was impossible for these people to prepare their own meals, let alone go to the grocery store. Now, all the volunteers, all the people who have helped, have gotten so much out of it. They see the people getting better. It gives them satisfaction to make a difference in someone's life."

**What others have to say about her:** "She wasn't afraid to be around people with AIDS at a time when no one was helping," said Fernando Castillo, Project Open Hands' first chef. Castillo began volunteering in 1986, after Brinker called to offer meal delivery for five friends who were living with him after they contracted the virus. Soon he was cooking meals for the program and spent 10 years as the staff chef. Brinker "opened the door to so many people who were ignorant about the disease," said Castillo, who has AIDS. "In the beginning people didn't understand what she was doing. There weren't enough volunteers, not enough money. She would say, 'Let's go see what we can get from the vendors.' They



SAM DEANER / The Chronicle 1997

Ruth Brinker started Project Open Hand when she realized many AIDS patients were dying of malnutrition.

could never say no to her. She changed everything — with her caring, her love and her food. That's what Project Open Hand is all about."

**To find out more:** Call (415) 447-2300 or visit [www.openhand.org](http://www.openhand.org).

**Editor's note:** On July 13, a fire damaged Brinker's Bernal Heights home, displacing her and her daughter Sara. Project Open Hand is working with Brinker's family to deal with the

loss. To contribute, send a check to The Ruth Brinker Fire Relief Fund, c/o First Republic Bank, 101 Pine Street, San Francisco, CA, 94111. Or to write to Ruth Brinker, contact her at: Brinker c/o Project Open Hand, 730 Polk St., San Francisco, CA, 94109.

**Nominate someone:** Do you know someone who deserves to be honored for community service? Go to [www.sfgate.com/jeffersonawards](http://www.sfgate.com/jeffersonawards).